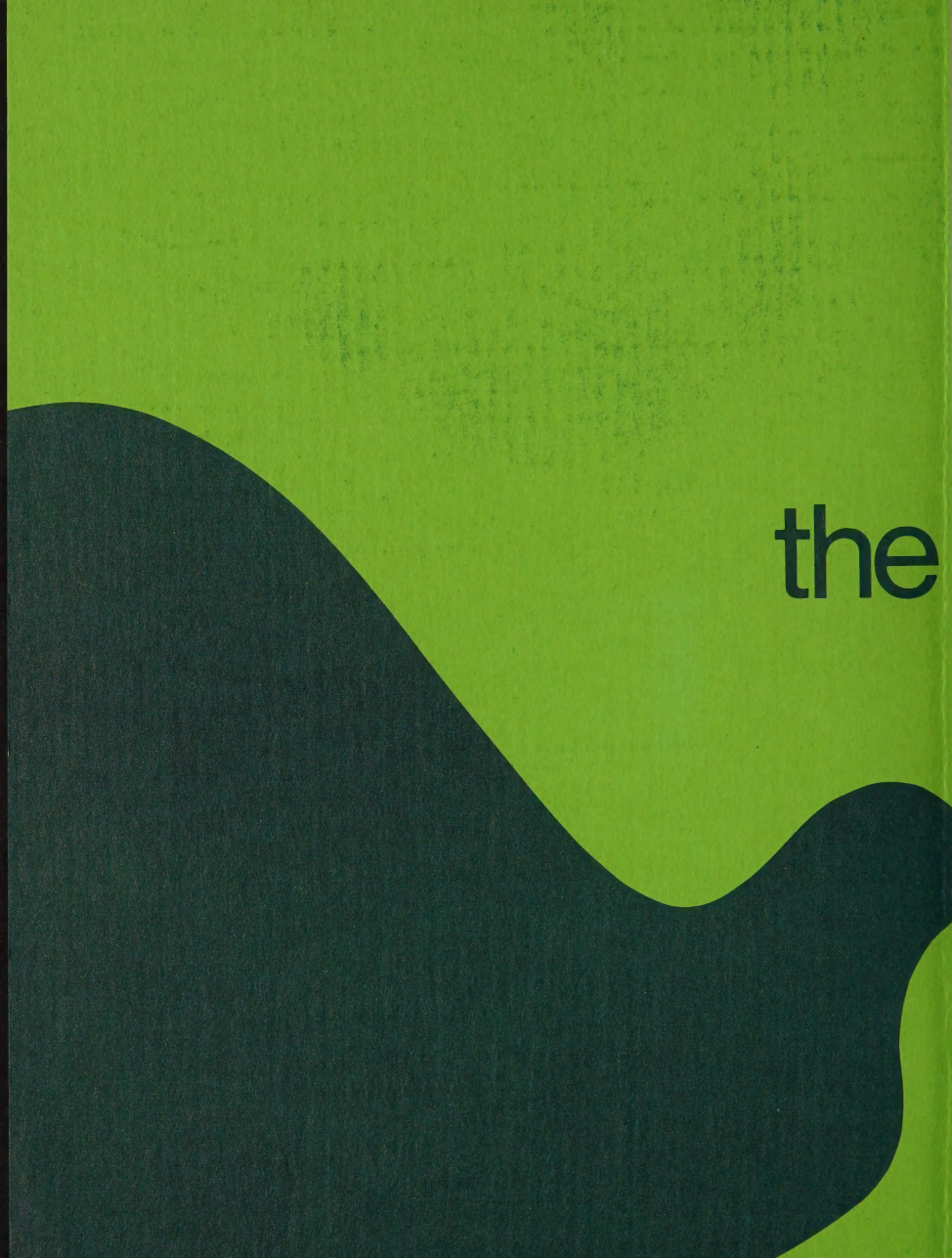
a christian declaration on

the way of peace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way of peace

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INTRODUCTION

The way of peace is at the heart of the Christian faith. God, in Christ, initiated peacemaking. He invites and enables a peace relationship with him and a peace relationship with our fellowman. "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). "To have your mind controlled by what the Spirit wants will result in life and peace" (Rom. 8:6).

To follow this way of peace is to discover joy and fulfillment in life. Jesus said, "I have come in order that they might have life, life in all its fulness" (Jn. 10:10). The Christian way is the way of life!

the way of peace

IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

1. The way of peace is the way of Jesus. Jesus is the Christian's authority for faith and life. ". . . Jesus Christ is the Lord . . ." (Phil. 2:11). The Christian's ultimate loyalty is to Jesus.

We affirm that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the law which came through Moses and the Old Testament. "In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son" (Heb. 1:1, 2). We do not claim a complete answer to the questions raised by the use of violence in the Old Testament by the people of God, but we hear Jesus saying clearly, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your friends, hate your enemies.' [44]But now I tell you: love your enemies . . ." (Mt. 5:43, 44).

In presenting the will of God for man, Jesus rejected violence as a means of bringing about right relationships. To follow the way of Jesus means to follow the way of peace.

1 Corinthians 3:11: . . . God has already placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation, and no other foundation can be laid.

Luke 9:23: "If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget himself, take up his cross every day, and follow me."

Ephesians 5:1, 2: Since you are God's dear children, you must try to be like him. Your life must be controlled by love, just as Christ loved us and gave his life for us. . . .

John 18:36: ". . . My kingdom does not belong to this world; if my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would fight. . . ."

2. The way of peace is the way of love. "God is love . . ." (1 Jn. 4:16). God's love for all is most clearly seen in the activity of Jesus Christ who redeems us from the alienation we experience with God, with ourselves, and with others. As reconciled people, Christians live the way of reconciling love. It should be expressed in the home, church, school, community, nation, and the world. It should be reflected in the Christian's word and in his

vocation. The way of love is the way of forgiveness, patience, peacemaking, and service. Christian love recognizes no barriers such as nation, race, class, or sex. The way of love sees no one as an enemy but sees all as persons to love.

In situations of conflict it may be necessary for Christians to suffer injustice. In fact, Christian love often calls Christian disciples to move into conflict situations with the willingness to absorb hostility and to suffer for the sake of righteousness and peace even as Jesus suffered.

> *1 John 4:9-11: This is how God showed his love for us: he sent his only Son into the world that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven. Dear friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another.*
>
> *Ephesians 4:32: be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you in Christ.*
>
> *Galatians 3:28: there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women: you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.*
>
> *Matthew 5:44, 45: "love your enemies, and pray for those who mistreat you, so that you will become sons of your Father in heaven."*
>
> *Romans 12:18: Do everything possible, on your part, to live at peace with all men.*
>
> *1 Peter 3:8, 9: love one another as brothers, and be kind and humble with one another. Do not pay back evil with evil, or cursing with cursing; instead pay back with a blessing. . . .*

3. The way of peace is the way of evangelism. Peace is at the heart of the Christian gospel of reconciling love. Evangelism is making the joyful proclamation that God

in Christ has already reconciled us to himself. God offers his peace to all and invites us to receive it and join in the ministry of reconciliation. "God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends, and gave us the task of making others his friends also. Our message is that God was making friends of all men through Christ" (2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

Peace with God cannot be separated from peace with the brother. To engage in war is to contradict the essence and ethic of the gospel. War and violence conflict sharply with the redemptive, winsome, loving call to become a part of the people of God. The Christian gospel of redemption is a gospel of peace!

Ezekiel 37:26, 27: "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them . . . and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Zechariah 4:6: ". . . Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."

Matthew 5:9: "Happy are those who work for peace among men: God will call them his sons!"

1 John 4:20: "If someone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For he cannot love God, whom he has not seen, if he does not love his brother, whom he has seen."

Acts 10:36: "You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, proclaiming the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all men."

Ephesians 2:17, 18: So Christ came and preached the Good News of peace to all. . . . It is through Christ that all of us, Jews and Gentiles, are able to come in the one Spirit into the presence of the Father.

Ephesians 6:14, 15: put on . . . the readiness to announce the Good News of peace as shoes for your feet.

4. The way of peace is the way of justice. The prophets and Jesus spoke much about the need for justice. They called for the kind of social change that would permit

righteousness to flourish. Micah said,". . . what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8). Jesus said, "How terrible for you teachers of the Law and Pharisees! Impostors! You give to God one tenth even of the seasoning herbs, such as mint, dill, and cumin, but you neglect to obey the really important teachings of the Law, such as justice and mercy and honesty" (Mt. 23:23).

Where there is an absence of justice, there is an absence of peace. Strife and wars are born of the selfishness and greed of individuals, groups, and nations. According to the biblical prophetic witness, the Christian is urged to free himself from the selfishness of materialism. He seeks to confront those who because of their greed cause injustice and oppression for others. And he seeks to identify with the oppressed and participate in ministries of love and service in their behalf.

James 4:1, 2: Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? They come from your passions, which are constantly fighting within your bodies. You want things, but you cannot have them, so you are ready to kill; you covet things, but you cannot get them, so you quarrel and fight.

Matthew 5:9: "Happy are those who work for peace among men: God will call them his sons!"

Matthew 26:52: "Put your sword back in its place, for all who take the sword will die by the sword."

Luke 4:18, 19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to preach the Good News to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free the oppressed,
To announce the year when the Lord will save his people!"

Matthew 25:40: ". . . I tell you, indeed, whenever you did this for one of these poorest brothers of mine, you did it for me!"

Romans 12:21: Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good.

The above affirmations state our belief that the Christian way is the way of peace. In all our relationships —with God, with neighbors, with nations—Christians are called to live the way of peace. The waging of war is the most obvious and tragic violation of God's will for peace. God does not have two standards of morality —one for government and one for Christians. Warfare is a denial of both the reconciling nature of the Christian gospel and of God's purpose for government (Rom. 12:4). All war and all that contributes to war is sin.

the way of peace
IN PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The way of peace is a way of life. It is much more than saying "No" to war. It is saying a joyful "Yes" to a life of self-giving discipleship and evangelistic peacemaking. We believe God gives us power to live this way now.

A life-style that reflects the way of peace begins in interpersonal relationships. It is expressed through a spirit of service and a concern for people. It is a life-style that places greater emphasis on a quality of life and relationships than on material affluence.

1. The way of peace applied to the use of resources. The total resources of our lives are a gift of God to be used to share the good news of love and peace with the world.

The investment of the *resource of time* requires that we work in vocations that are constructive, that meet legitimate needs of people, and that are consistent with a witness of peace and love. Priority should be given to the consideration of vocational choices that make possible a constructive demonstration and witness of our Christian faith. Voluntary service through a church agency is one way to give expression to this kind of Christian commitment of time. Such opportunities are open for all—not just draft-age young men. Other meaningful service opportunities available through our Conference and the Mennonite Central Committee include involvements in missions, relief, reconstruction, resettlement, disaster aid, political action, and witness to the state. In all of these ways the resource of time is applied to a work of peace done "in the name of Christ."

FOOD FOR RELIEF
FOOD FOR RELIEF
FROM: MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE
SECOURS
AKRON
MENNONITE
PENNA., U.S.A.

The wise use of *world resources* is essential to live the way of peace. Indiscriminate use and waste of natural resources that accents the gulf between the haves and the have-nots in the world is a road to violent revolution. The peace way is to conserve resources, not to deplete them. For nations to overuse the world's resources is exploitation. To use the goods of others—those exploited today or those of an unborn generation—is to sow the seeds of war. Peacemakers are good stewards of the world's resources.

Placing the right value on the *resource of money* is another witness for peace. We are concerned about the use of time and money in vocations to finance programs or products useful to the military interest of our nation. A life-style reflected by the Voluntary Service model that places a premium on service and relationships and sharing over the accumulation of money is a peace witness that can be applied to life outside the structured Voluntary Service program. Generous contributions to causes that promote human welfare is an investment for peace.

2. The way of peace applied to citizenship. It is the desire of a Christian to be a good citizen. We believe that God has ordained government for various functions such as the maintenance of order, the protection of the innocent, the restraint of evildoers, the preservation of the fabric of society. We encourage our governments in this legitimate function. As responsible Christian citizens, it is our duty to support the government, enabling it to be God's servant for man's good. It is good to pray for leaders of governments, to be productive and moral citizens, and to respect and obey government when it performs its God-ordained function. (See Romans 13:1, 4, 6, 7; 1 Timothy 2:1, 2, and 1 Peter 2:13-17.)

However, a Christian gives ultimate allegiance to Jesus Christ. A Christian's primary citizenship is in Christ's kingdom which is not limited to any national or political

boundaries. Thus citizenship within a country stands beneath our loyalty to Jesus Christ and His church. When governments seek to coerce persons to support laws or customs contrary to Scripture or to the implications of Scripture, or when governments seek to prevent persons from fulfilling the requirements of clear implications of Scripture, Christians must disobey their government and declare with the early Christians, "We must obey God, not men" (Acts 5:29). (Also see Daniel 1:8; 3:12; 6:10; Matthew 4:1-11; 12:1-8.) The Christian sees disobedience to God as a more serious matter than disobedi-

ence to the state when the two are in conflict. The Christian brotherhood should be involved in the decision and support of persons who disobey the law for conscience' sake.

Nationalism is one of the clearest forms of idolatry today. Many do not question any demands the government makes. They see it their duty to support all the actions of government in order to be good citizens. This form of nationalism and idolatrous patriotism we must reject as contrary to a Christian's citizenship in the kingdom of God.

As members of an international brotherhood, we believe the spirit of international concern to be more in keeping with Christian love and unity than an excessive spirit of nationalism. All nations are respected and seen as a part of the total world family. The values, customs, and culture of each are respected. We see ourselves as world citizens.

3. The way of peace applied to conscription and military service. Conscription for military service is a means by which modern nations are able to wage war. We therefore will work for the termination of conscription or any involuntary recruitment program.

As Christians desiring to follow the Jesus way of love, we cannot accept service in any military organization, either in combatant or noncombatant position. This applies to all wars, whether designated defensive or offensive.

Wherever and whenever conscription exists, we will encourage draft age youth to enter some form of meaningful alternative service program. Under the Lordship of Christ, we claim the right of conscientious objection to war. We appreciate the legal provision governments make for recognition of this right. Where governments have not acknowledged this right we call on them to do so. As a church we shall continue to provide channels for Christian service both at home and abroad, and will encourage our youth to witness for peace in these church programs. Youth who desire to participate in an alternative service program are encouraged to seek positions which identify with the suffering in the world and thereby seek to prevent violence and war.

Affirming the priesthood of all believers, we recommend that Christians not make use of ministerial exemption to avoid alternative obligations.

Some of our brotherhood see cooperation with conscription as contrary to Christian discipleship. Since conscription helps make it possible to wage war, it is im-

portant to question whether this is a proper function of governments and to discern what response faithfulness to Christ asks of us. We recognize noncooperation with the military draft when based on loyalty to Jesus as a valid witness. We pledge the resources of our brotherhood to a supportive ministry to young men who take such a stand. We ask our counseling and service agencies to work closely with young men who have chosen to migrate to another country or who suffer imprisonment as a witness against militarism.

We recognize that some in our denomination have continued to accept or endorse military service. As a church

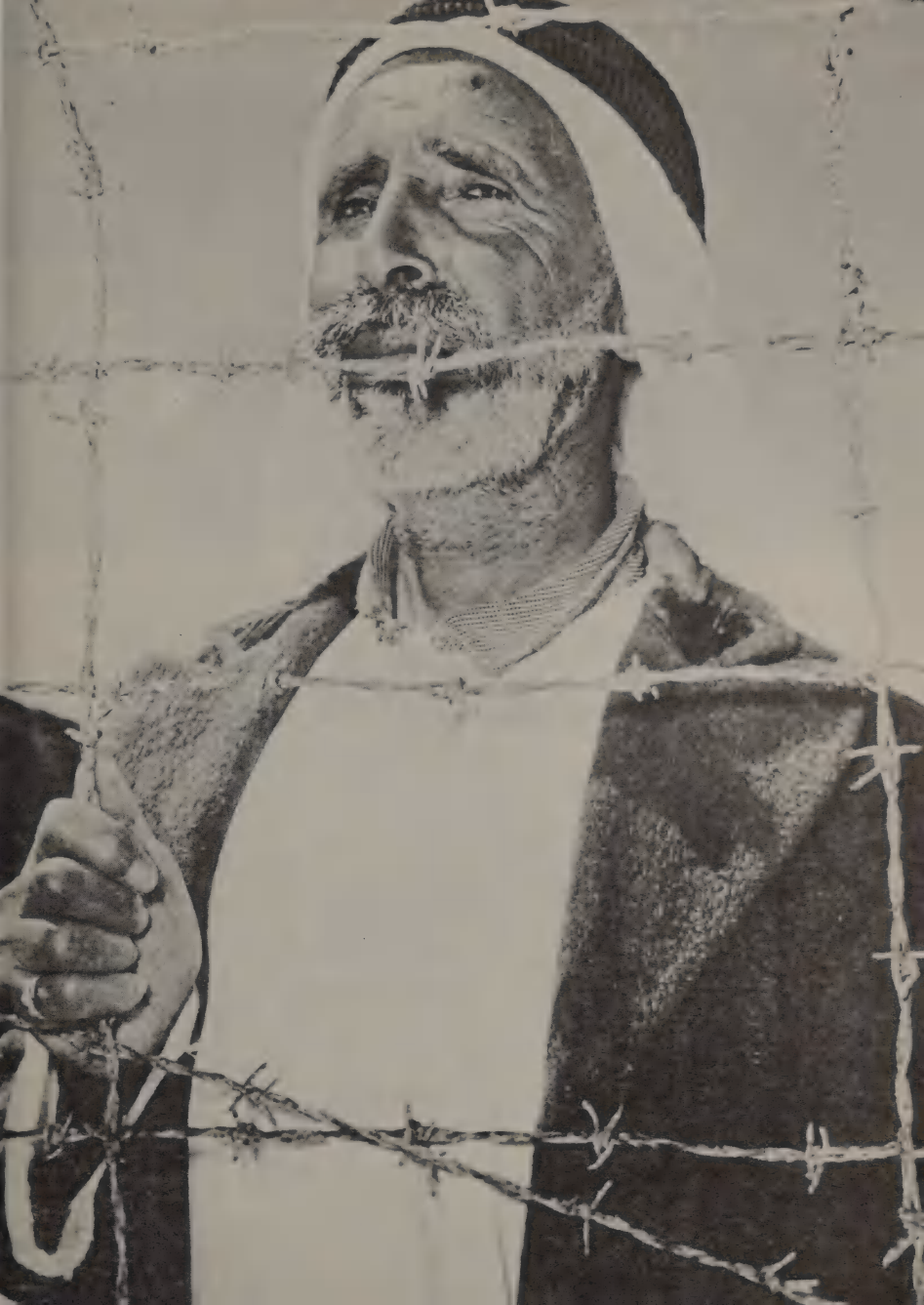
and as individuals we seek meaningful and open dialogue with them in the search for the way of peace and continue to offer a ministry to such persons.

We also recognize and encourage persons from other religious traditions who are conscientious objectors to killing their fellowmen in war. We make our service organizations available to such youth who wish to serve in such an alternative peace assignment in the Spirit of Christ. We also recognize and respect the position of other persons who for various reasons refuse to participate in any war or who are selective objectors. We acknowledge the witness against war outside our own brotherhood and seek when possible to relate to such persons or groups in working for peace.

The levying of war taxes is another form of conscription which, along with the conscription of manpower, makes war possible. We are accountable to God for the use of our financial resources and should protest the use of our taxes in the promotion and waging of war. We stand by those who feel called to resist the payment of that portion of taxes being used for military purposes.

4. The way of peace applied to social change. To work for peace in our nation and world requires the reordering of personal and national priorities. It means to work at the elimination or reduction of the causes of violence and war. This cannot be done without tension and creative conflict. Working at root causes of war demands changes in our society that cannot come easily. Inequities, injustices, discrimination, and political power are some of the realities to be dealt with in working for the kind of social change that can work for peace. It is particularly essential that we work diligently to eliminate the causes of racial tension, recognizing and working to guarantee the basic rights and freedoms of all people.

Christians need to work for the kind of change that can create a climate for community, national, and inter-



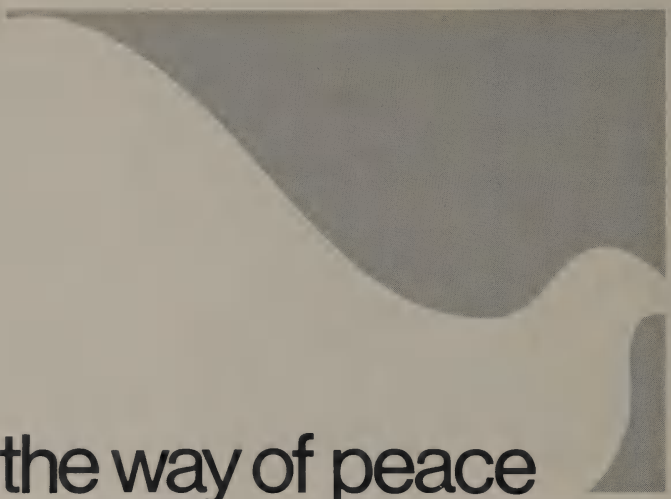
national peace. To be silent is to encourage the exploitive status quo. It is important and right that Christians consciously get involved in creative action for peace.

We affirm a variety of ways to witness for creative social change. One way is to work to change the ideas of people. This is a one-to-one witness in most cases. It is the sharing of the gospel of reconciliation in a way that the implications of the gospel to issues of war and peace are shared. Changed people make a changed society.

A second way to work for social change is to work to change structures. This way includes witnessing to government officials; it includes calling attention to social evils through exposing them through various kinds of nonviolent action. This approach includes such things as involvement in politics by running for office, actively campaigning for candidates who support constructive social change, keeping informed and voting for the most appro-

priate candidates, and encouraging persons in government who are trying to change structures for the good. This, like the first option, is slow, but works from within the system to change it. Some Christians are called to work in this way.

A third kind of witness to work for social change is to live a viable option. Persons witnessing in this way feel that, rather than compromising their position by working from within the system, they will live the kind of life of sharing and disassociation from the system which becomes a demonstration of another way. As much as possible this witness rejects the affluence of a society responsible for the exploitation of others. Those thus committed live very simply, using as much of their resources as possible to share a life of faith, love, and peace. Such persons effectively witness to the way of peace by living the way of peace.



the way of peace

OUR CONFESSION AND COMMITMENT

A position statement can never be an absolute or final statement. However, this statement testifies to our conviction that this is the direction the Spirit is moving us in these days.

We recognize that not everyone in our brotherhood believes the same concerning the way of peace. There is room for much creative dialogue within our denomination and with people of other denominations. In this way we seek to grow in our understanding and practice of the Jesus way of peace, doing our best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by the peace which binds us together (Eph. 4:3).

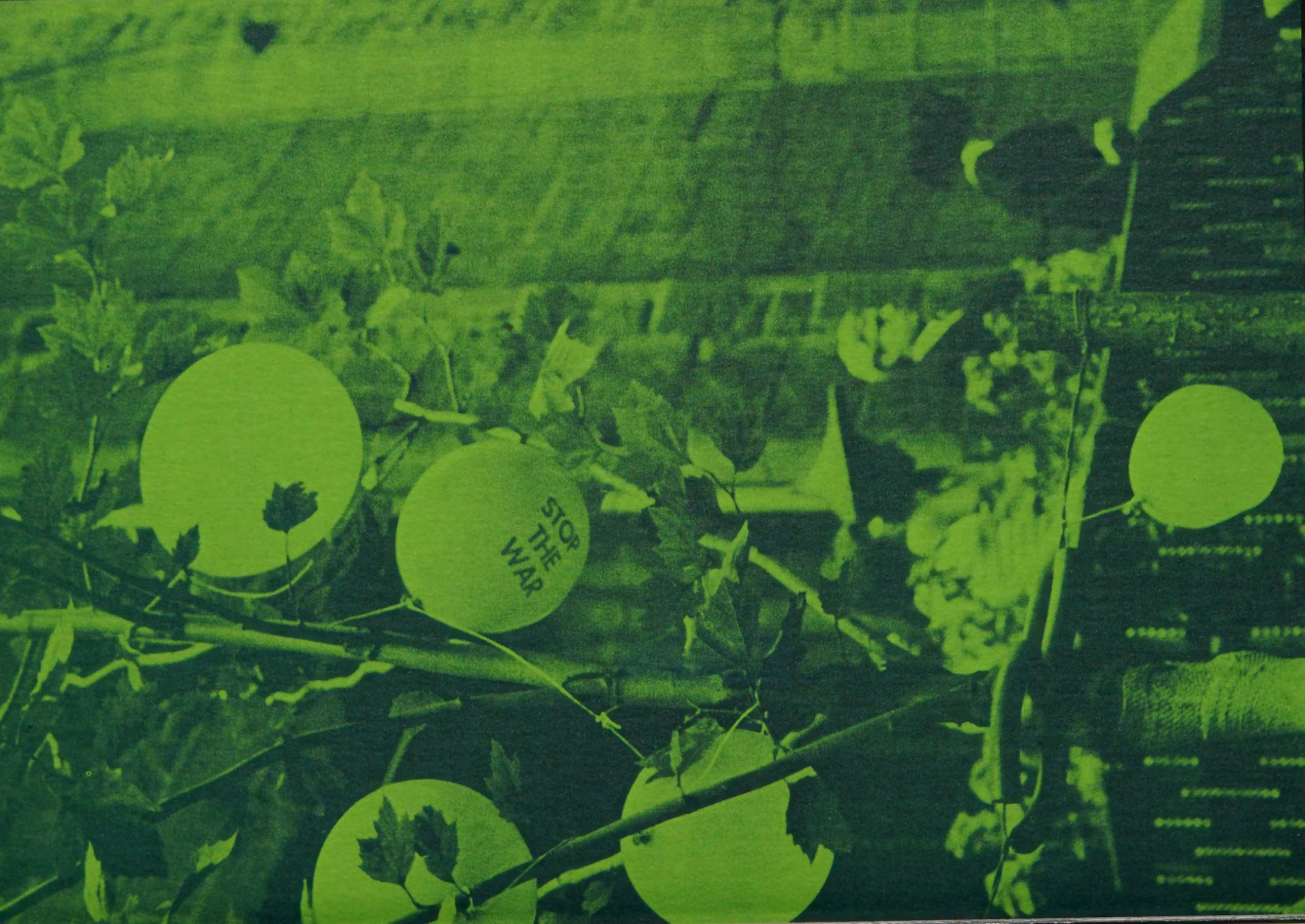
We confess many failures in trying to live the way of peace. As Christian disciples, we seek to be obedient to the way of peace Jesus taught and lived and for which He died.

The Christian Church in its beginning saw the way of Jesus as the way of peace. In the sixteenth century the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement renewed the witness that the way of radical love is the way of life for Christian disciples. Throughout the history of the Mennonite Church this teaching has been continually reaffirmed.

In 1941 the General Conference Mennonite Church adopted a statement on "Peace, War, Military Service, and Patriotism." In 1953 the Conference adopted the statement, "A Christian Declaration on Peace, War, and Military Service."

Continuing militarism and growing concern in the brotherhood that we define more clearly the Christian way of peace in today's society have called for an updating of a statement on peace.

THE WAY OF PEACE was adopted by resolution by the General Conference Mennonite Church at its triennial session at Fresno, California, in August, 1971.


STOP
THE
WAR

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